



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

Sept 2009

September Meeting:

This meeting will take place at 7.30pm on Wednesday 16th September, in the Community Club, as usual

Devon Inns and their Signs

Speaker - Robert Hesketh

Robert Hesketh is a local historian and has published a number of books on pub walks in Devon, as well as other topics of local interest.

Non members of the Society are very welcome to join us for a donation of £2 payable at the door.

August Field Trip:

On a beautiful, clear evening on 19th August, a group of intrepid sailors from the History Society set sail from Brixham. We were aboard the Vigilance, a 1930's 78ft sailing ketch, built in Brixham and part of the Brixham heritage fleet. Our skipper for the evening was Richard Burton ably assisted by his crew. Some of us helped hoist the sails, very hard work, and most also tried their hand at steering. Once the engine was cut, we got to appreciate the peace and tranquillity of the sea, as we sailed far out into the bay. As the sun went down, we could see the lights along the coast all the way to Paignton and beyond. A memorable trip, which we all very much enjoyed.

The vigilance is operated by a team of devoted volunteers, and the income derived from such trips is used to help fund the maintenance costs. Trips are run on a regular basis, and if you want more information, do visit their website. www.vigilanceofbrixham.co.uk



Submarine Disaster:

In St Andrews Church I recently had pointed out to me a very small brass plaque dedicated to a Robert Middlemist. The plaque states that he lost his life on Submarine K5. I was intrigued by this and decided to try and find out more about this incident, and also, perhaps, a little more about Robert Middlemist:

Lt. Robert James Mentieth Middlemist R.N. died on 20th January 1921 whilst serving on board the submarine K5. The K5 left Torbay on 19th January 1921 with the K8, K15, K10 and K22 for a mock battle in the Bay of Biscay. The K5 had an experienced captain in Lt. Commander Gaimes but a new crew, and Robert Middlemist who was an Acting Lieutenant. The submarine K5 signalled its intention to dive on 20th January when 120 miles south west of the Scilly Isles. She never resurfaced, and it was presumed that she had exceeded her safe working depth. All fifty seven officers and men aboard died. All that was recovered was a battery cover and a sailor's ditty box.

At first this just seems to be another sad death of a young serviceman from Moretonhampstead, serving his country; but the fact that it happened in a K class submarine makes it more significant.

The K class of submarines were the brainchild of Admiral Jellicoe. At 339 ft long they were nearly twice the size of most other submarines. They were made this long to achieve a top speed on the surface of 24 knots. Unfortunately this meant that when the submarine dived, the bow could be at crush depth whilst the stern was still near the surface. The submarines were steam driven! They had two funnels that had to be retracted before the dive could take place, and this was a constant source of leaks and problems, and was of particular concern in the case of a crash dive or bad weather.

The K class were very unhappy ships that suffered a number of accidents. K13 for instance, sunk with all hands during her acceptance trials. In the end, these submarines were scrapped and two of the hulls that were still being built were given over to an even more peculiar class of submarine, the M class. These also both sank with all hands.

Robert James Mentieth Middlemist was born in Moretonhamstead on 20th December 1899, and baptised on 24th January 1900 in St Andrews Church. He was the only son of James Mentieth and Millie Annette Middlemist. (nee' Clack) .The family lived at Cookshayes. His parents were married in St Andrews on 12th May 1897. His father died on 5th June 1900 at the age of 32, when Robert was still only a few months old, so he was never to know of the tragic death of his son some 21 years later.

If you want to see the plaque mentioned in this article, it can be found on the wall on the right hand side of the church at the bottom of the nave.

Bear Necessities!

This story comes from Bob Piggot, who was the Vet here from the 1960's. Bob took over from a father & two of his sons, by the name of Saunder. They were all vet practitioners (not qualified but experienced in the basic care and treatment of animals), and had practised in Moreton from before the war. Apparently in 1930, they received a telegram asking them to go urgently to Withycombe to attend to a horse with colic. They had no phone in those early days, hence the telegram. They all set off on horseback, only to find when they got there that they had gone to the wrong place, the telegram should have read Widecombe, alas some 10 miles in the opposite direction! They then headed for Widecombe, on reaching Midfield gate, all three horses shied back and would go no further, no amount of cajoling by the riders would persuade them to take another step. One of the brothers dismounted and went to investigate. He found in the hedge a little way on, a large brown bear and his handler, both fast asleep. Apparently they had come from Widecombe, the fair having been held there the day before. As the horses would not pass the bear, there was no alternative but for the 3 but to retrace their steps yet again and head for Widicombe via the Brinning road.

We don't know if the horse with the colic survived!

October Meeting: AGM

Our October meeting will take place in the Stable Bar of the Union Inn, on Wednesday 21st October, and **not** in the Community Club, our usual venue. This meeting will begin with the **AGM**. Do, please, make every effort to attend this meeting, the formalities of the AGM are soon dealt with and this will be followed by an entertaining evening devised by the Chairman!

Please note that your **annual subscription becomes due** on this date, £10 for a single membership & £15 for two persons at the same address. Please be prompt with this payment for the sake of the Membership Secretary!